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Getting Out From Under The Shadow of the Bomb

PRESIDENT Johnson deserves every accolade of a tormented humanity for his recent initiatives toward containment of the nuclear terror that hangs over the world. If the U.S.-Soviet talks on nuclear disarmament succeed, his Administration will surely be remembered above all as the turning point toward world survival, a climax to overshadow all the other magnificent blunders and accomplishments of the most paradoxical President of U.S. history.

The arms race has, for a generation, robbed an impatient species of the main fruits of technological progress. It has blown the minds of our adolescents ~~who~~ only "blah" for a future. It

who see

has stolen the bricks and mortar and know-how from the rebuilding of the cities.

THESE COSTS of terror and depletion are known to all and appreciated by few; they have certainly received only an incidental priority of national action. Indeed, we must ask an awkward question: "Are the American people, or the Russian, really ready to talk peace?" The President and the statesmen he can recruit for this noblest and most difficult mission may have a clear vision of an unshackled world, and in striving for it they may lead the people—but not too far; and particularly not in an election year so full of calculated confusion and evasion.

Thirty years of enthrallment to military security, major and minor wars, Red hunts, our own use of nuclear weapons (yes: Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and unremitting anxiety about Armageddon have left an indelible mark on the American psyche. The scars on the other side run for deeper: besides their history of Stalinist and Hitlerian genocide, a nuclear No. 2 has to try harder.

Soviet leaders have been quick to point out the many serious conflicts that still rend the world scene—not that we can have forgotten. These issues of political substance resonate with ever-hardening psychic attitudes in a self-perpetuating cycle of mutual insult and injury.

THE TURNING point for the Russians may have been Sputnik, which symbolized their achievement of technical parity with the West in a major area of national security. Since then, they could afford to relax and begun to do so while the major powers approached a more stable equilibrium of mutual nuclear deterrence.

Many psychiatrists have

pointed out that hostility, once established, is a disease hard to remedy. Certainly, to berate the anxiety and prejudice of the radical right and Red-hating movements does nothing to alleviate their deep-rooted appeal to fear. Rational argument is not necessarily better at alleviating political paranoia.

The only reliable approach to alleviating group hostility, according to the studies of social psychologists, is cooperation in reaching superordinate goals. Most of us already perceive such a goal: sheer survival, for no one wins a thermonuclear game. This may be too abstract for universal acceptance; the threat had to start speaking in Chinese to be sufficiently widely understood.

ARMS-CONTROL negotiations are a hazardous undertaking in the present climate. They may be far worse than futile if, as may happen, the talks themselves generate new confrontations and misunderstandings. They will go on for a long time, and it is doubtful that major fundamental settlements can be reached before the nations become more accustomed to mutual confidence. The issue of what to talk about is already being exploited as a bargaining point: for our we should try to focus on irritating and dangerous issues, like "the threat for mankind from the use of chemical and biological weapons"—Kosygin—which are still peripheral to the vital strategic interests of the major powers.

This issue, above all, can also be related to another superordinate goal, the dedication of biological research to global freedom from disease.

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